FIRST MAN LYNCHED IN THE KLONDYKE.

For Stealing a Bit of Bacon, Prospector W. G. Martin Gave Up His Life, Dying with a Last Message to His Wife and Baby in the Moonlit Solitudes of Lake Bennett.

JUNEAU, Sept. 8, via. Seattle, Sept. 8.—Among the pines on the shores of Lake Bennett on the Klondyke trail the dead body of a man is swinging at a rope's end and next to his cold breast is a faded photograph and a lock of baby hair.

The body is that of William G. Martin, of Missouri, the first victim of lynch law in the new Eldorado.

A hundred miles away his former companions are toiling along with stern eyes and mirthless hearts toward the gold fields. They hanged poor Billy Martin, left him and forgot him.

The body swings and twists in the mountain winds. It gazes with stark eyes up the long, stony trail its companions have taken. It turns again and looks far across the pine hills toward Missouri, where a wife and little boy are awaiting a happy return.

Yesterday a steamer captain brought the news of the lynching of Martin and the explanatory note from John Hogan and Bernard Giers.

Nobody who knew "Billy" Martin when he was here ever dreamed that he would gain the dubious distinction of being the first man lynched in the Klondyke.

He arrived in Juneau late in August with an outfit weighing about 1,000 pounds. He was anxious to start at once for the gold fields, but was obliged to wait for the arrival of a belated party. He seemed a quiet, thoughtful sort of man, with nothing radically wrong about him.

There were about thirty men in the party. All but one of them were stern, broad-shouldered, bearded men, with stout hearts and iron muscles. The exception was a pale-faced, studious looking boy named Ferry. He had a cough, and whenever he became over tired one of the big, whiskered giants would swing the boy's pack atop his own with a good natured laugh and carry it for a mile or two.

It took the party five days to get across the pass. In the meantime Martin had evidently discovered that he had made a miscalculation in the matter of provisions. His stock was running low, and it was only a matter of a few days before he would either have to return or starve.

His light outfit had already attracted some attention in the camp, and his solitary and preoccupied manner was commented upon. "He's a little daffy," said one. "He's in love with his wife," said another who had seen Martin kissing a small and dingy photograph.

Camp followed camp in monotonous succession. There were the long daily tramps over the difficult trail, the hours of dogged, desperate silence, the stolid dreams of gold, the twilight of awful mountains, the glimmering campfires, the troubled slumbers, and again the sunrise and the long march.

So it went, until the little party, plunging deeper and deeper into the wilderness, came upon the shores of Lake Bennett.

The Theft of the Bacon.

On the margin of the lake the camp was made, and the evening fires were lighted. Then, when the miners were preparing to cook their frugal repast, Abner Davis discovered that somebody had stolen a side of bacon from his outfit.

Davis strode over to the camp of John Hogan, who was regarded as the leader of the party and made known his loss.

"Don't say anything about it until after supper, Abner," advised Hogan. "Then we'll hold a meeting. If we've got a thief in the outfit we must clear him out damned quick."

After the supper of bacon and bread and black coffee, the men gathered around Hogan's campfire looking very serious. "Where's Martin?" somebody asked. "He's out on the lake fishing," replied Ferry, the sickly looking boy.

Then Hogan got up and made a sort of speech. "Men," said he, "there's a thief among us. Abner Davis has missed a side of bacon he had when we camped here this evening. There aint no wolves about so early in the night. Now, what I propose is that every man of us have his outfit searched.

"And, men—I aint sayin' this to any particular person, but to all of us, myself included—the one that stole Abner Davis's bacon is in a mighty unhealthy locality. That's all I've got to say."

Hogan's plan was agreed to. A committee was appointed, and the search was prosecuted with vigor. Outfit after outfit was inspected, but nothing suspicious was found.

"Whar's Martin's camp?" suddenly asked one of the committee.

"That's so," exclaimed another. "He's camped up thar in the brush. I saw him fixin' around his fire this evening."

The committee clambered up the hillside to the solitary camp. It was built in the lee of a dense clump of chaparral and mountain gorse. Martin was still absent. The fire was burning low.

Everything was thoroughly searched. In a small flat knapsack the committee found a faded photograph, mulled with much handling, and a long tress of yellow hair that had been clipped from a baby's head. The two were tied together with an old leather shoestring.

Martin's provision bag was opened. Two pieces of bacon were found. One was small and thin and scrawny. It was Martin's. The other was large and streaky and good to look upon. It was Davis's. It had been marked "A. B.," but the letters had been clipped away with a knife.

Another meeting was called at Hogan's tent. The men gathered around it one by one, silent and determined. Wood was piled on the fire until the surroundings were as bright as day.

Then the miners sat down, smoking after the fashion of Indians, and waiting for Hogan to speak.

"Men," said Hogan, after a long pause, "you all know who the thief is, and you know the sneakin' crime he has committed. Here we are, all honest men, trying to get to the Klondyke. We have only enough provisions to carry us through, and yet a thief who has come along without his proper share is stealing from us. I move we hang this man and do it quick."

Abner Davis was the next speaker: "I don't care a —— for the bacon, and you all know that. It's the principle of the thing I am kickin' about. He could have shared my camp fire of he had asked it. It is not becoming for me to vote, bein' the plaintiff, so I wont vote, but I want to say that I believe that all such varmints should be strung up."

They Voted to Hang Him.

Others among the miners spoke in favor of Martin's execution, and a vote was taken. Two scraps of paper were given to each man. One was marked with a cross, which meant death. The other was left blank; this meant life.

The votes were cast one by one into a hat, and one by one they were drawn out and read by Hogan. "Death! death! death!" fell monotonously from his lips. "Death! death! death!" and then "life," the only one in the entire number of ballots.

"The majority decides in favor of death," said Hogan; "there is only one vote in favor of life, and I would like to know the name of the white-livered person that throwed it in."

Then there was a commotion. Into the circle of firelight stepped Ferry, the thin-faced boy with the cough. His face was as white as death.

"It was me," he began, in a voice that was half a whisper; "it was me. I throwed it in. Don't do this thing, men. Let Martin go. God will reward you for it. That poor man is trying to get to the Klondyke. He has sold all he has on earth to do it. He has a wife and baby at home. It was only an error of judgment. He did not have enough provisions, and has even spent the nights catching fish to eke out his store. He tried to buy provisions from you, and you know it.

"Yet, it was me that done it, and I would vote for the life of a dog under the same circumstances. I would vote for any one of you, if you were going to be killed by your—your bro'—brothers."

Then Ferry broke down in a fit of coughing, and put his handkerchief to his face. When he took it away it was streaked with blood.

"He'll know better when he grows up," was the only comment made by the miners, as they began preparations for the execution. On the outposts of civilization affairs of this kind are quickly arranged.

It was not a noisy crowd that wended its way up the hill. There was nothing of the frenzied, maddened mob about it. The miners were orderly and cool, and the leader carried a rope.

The Confession.

Under the sheltering arms of a pine, with his face gleaming in the moonlight, Martin lay asleep. The black silhouettes of his executioners were all about him.

One of them, said to have been Bernard Giers, roughly kicked the sleeping man with his foot. "What's up? What's the matter, boys?" queried Martin, sitting up and blinking sleepily.

"Git up," replied the leader, roughly. "We stand no stealing in this camp. Your time has come. We'll teach you a —— good lesson."

Martin rose to his feet. His face shone in the moonshine like carved marble. Twice he tried to speak and twice his voice failed him.

"Do you want to leave a message to your friends?" asked the leader.

"No," said Martin, in a half whisper.

"Do you want to pray?"

"No," replied the doomed man.

"If there is anything you want to say, say it quick," said the spokesman.

A slip knot had been made at the end of a long rope, and the noose was put over Martin's head. He was then led out from under the pine tree, and under the full light of the moon.

For a while he stood silent. In that brief interval his executioners could hear through the troubled flow of the pine forests the mournful run of wild wolves in the wilderness about the camp.

"Boys," Martin began in a faltering voice, "I aint a bad man, and I aint a natural born thief. You know how it is when a man mortgages his all, starts for the Klondyke and sees that he can't get there. No matter whether you hang me or not, my life aint worth much. I don't care, only for my—my"——

Here Martin's voice broke and faltered. Then he threw his head back and continued abruptly: "I've got a thousand pounds of stuff at Skaguay, and I'll promise on my life to carry it in here for you if you'll"——

"Enough of that," interrupted the leader, roughly. "It would not save you even if the stuff was here. You stole the bacon 'n' you know it.

"Then wait just a minute, boys. Will you let me look in my knapsack?" asked the doomed man.

Permission was given, and Martin, after rummaging around for a moment, brought the faded photograph and lock of baby hair. These he kissed reverently and placed in his bosom, turning his back on the men to do so.

The Lynching.

Then he half ran and was half dragged down to the shore of the lake. It took less than a minute to lash two slender pines dressed for masts in a forked upright, and to drop another mast from a rock on the bluff over between the forks.

While these preparations were being made Martin sat on a stone, waiting.

"Come, now," said the leader; "off you go."

"May I write a message, boys?" asked Martin.

"Yes, but be quick," was the short response. "It's time we was in bed."

Martin took a soiled letter from his pocket and kissed it tenderly. He then tore it up, saving only the envelope.

He pulled off one of his rubber boots, and, placing the envelope on the sole of it, wrote in the moonlight the following:

Hoping that with the money I might make in the Klondyke, sacrifice would go out of the door and love return through the wisdow, I left you. Kiss Ted, but never tell him. GID.

That was all. It was only a few words, but it was Martin's life history. It contains volumes to those who will know and understand.

It was written slowly and carefully and with many pauses. He showed the note to the crowd saying: "Boys, will some of you please send this back to the newspapers?"

Then he stood up manfully and announced his readiness. His hands were tied together behind him with a pack strap.

There was a hurried command, a hard swing at the rope and it was all over. All except the weeping of Ferry in the darkness.

"Come, boys, let's go to bed," said Hogan. Then the party of executioners went back to camp, rolled themselves in their blankets and went to sleep, while down on the margin of the lake the black thing that was once a man, with human hope, love and ambition, swung idly in the wind.

With the envelope, bearing Martin's last message, his executioners sent back to Juneau a rudely written letter excusing their act as best they could.

Martin's body is still hanging on the shores of Lake Bennett, unless it has been taken down lately.

On the other side of the envelope on which Martin wrote was his name and the postmark "St. Louis."

The news of his hanging was brought to Juneau by Captain Martin, of the steamer Sea Lion, and Stephen A. Hall, of Seattle.

H. L. M.

HOW THEY JUSTIFIED THE HANGING.

TO All Whom It May Concern:

This is to certify that we hanged William G. Martin, of St. Louis, Mo., in justice to ourselves and all those who travel the trail to Klondyke.

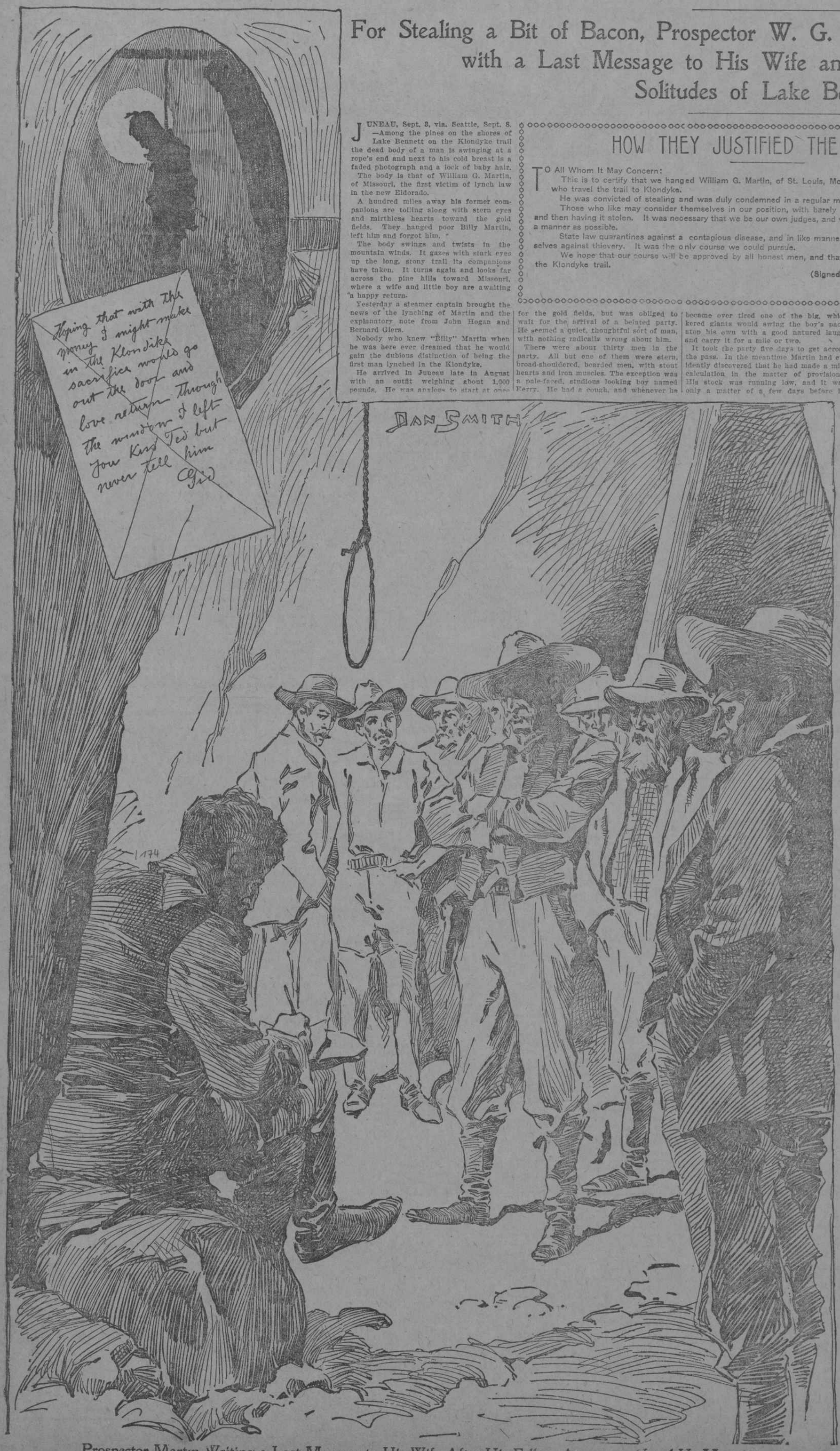
He was convicted of stealing and was duly condemned in a regular manner.

Those who like may consider themselves in our position, with barely enough grub to reach our destination, and then having it stolen. It was necessary that we be our own judges, and we took the law into our hands in as just a manner as possible.

State law quarantines against a contagious disease, and in like manner we have attempted to quarantine ourselves against thievery. It was the only course we could pursue.

We hope that our course will be approved by all honest men, and that it will be a warning to all thieves along the Klondyke trail.

(Signed) JOHN HOGAN, BERNARD GIERS, WILLIAM BAKER, } Committee.



Prospector Martin Writing a Last Message to His Wife After His Fellow Argonauts Voted He Must Die.